Deniz Yonucu: *Police, Provocation, Politics: Counterinsurgency in Istanbul*. Cornell University Press, 2022. 222 pp., Hardback, $130. 150176215X.

This book, which received the 2023 Anthony Leeds Prize for the best book in urban anthropology, critically analyzes the state's use of irregular warfare and counterinsurgency strategies against dissident groups in the context of a working-class neighbourhood in Istanbul, with global examples and connections. Anthropologist Deniz Yonucu has chosen a complex subject to study. On the one hand, she analyses the development of counter-guerrilla strategies of the police department of the state institution since the Cold War period. On the other, she emphasises this apparatus of violence as an institution that ensures the maintenance of control and even controls violence instead of maintaining "order" in society. Yonucu's research for this book lasted over four years and involved interviews of over a one-hundred people and work in both local and national archives. The book, which consists of eight chapters, including an introduction and epilogue, makes important connections between both the theoretical (the Cold War-era doctrine of low-intensity conflict) and practical (the transfer of violence in northern Kurdistan to a neighborhood—Devrimova—in western Turkey) origins of the provocative violence perpetrated by the Turkish state through the police. The book follows a chronological arc from the establishment of the Devrimova neighborhood in the 1970s by Alevis arriving from outside of Istanbul to the Gezi protests in 2013.

Given the constraints of this brief review, a comprehensive discussion of the book is not possible. However, I believe it is particularly crucial to underscore three main issues addressed in it: (1) the importation and adoption of the international counter-guerrilla strategy and the concept of low-intensity conflict; (2) the examination of Alevi neighbourhoods in western Turkey as a case study of the strategies employed by both official and unofficial state forces in the Kurdish-Turkish conflict; (3) the characterisation of youth resistance in opposition neighbourhoods as a form of "good vigilantism."

First, although provocative counter-organizations have a historical presence dating back to the late-Ottoman period, the theoretical framework for such formations experienced significant development after Turkey joined NATO in 1952. Yonucu illustrates this relationality through two texts: the initial one being Galula's work, "Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice," first published in 1964 and the second, NATO's 2011 publication, "The Allied Joint Doctrine of Counterinsurgency (COIN)." These texts were translated into Turkish and taught as course material in army and police academies. In addition, it is widely known that both US and UK officers trained Turkish police and selected members of the security forces involved in

counterinsurgency. As Yonucu states, "To aid them in their fight against left-wing and pro-Kurdish mobilizations, Turkish military and police officers received training in irregular and low-intensity warfare in the United Kingdom and the United States" (6). Hence, in addition to a legacy of employing paramilitary and counter-guerrilla strategies to supress dissidents that dates back to the late-Ottoman period, the Turkish state, through its membership in NATO, has access to and imports strategies developed by other states.

Another little-discussed but very significant issue raised by Yonucu is the fact that, "The spatial counterinsurgency techniques applied in the neighborhoods were directly exported from Northern Kurdistan" (65). During the conflicts between the PKK and the Turkish state, which began in 1984 and reached its peak violence during the 1990s, the state extensively applied counterinsurgency strategies similar to those employed by NATO countries against communist guerrilla forces during the same decade. This state-driven approach, commonly characterised as low-intensity conflict, has primarily targeted civilians allegedly supporting the PKK. One prominent manifestation of this policy was the widespread burning of villages, compelling millions of Kurds to relocate to cities in western Turkey. The Turkish state has thus employed provocative strategies of control and intimidation, using the police and various irregular groups, against both Kurds migrating to western Turkey and in neighborhoods in western Turkey where support for the Kurdish opposition is widespread.

Third, the book's fourth chapter makes a remarkable contribution to the existing literature by examining the controversial topic of vigilantism. The chapter examines vigilantism in two contrasting categories: good vigilantism and bad vigilantism. Vigilantism is generally thought to involve small or large groups, which can be armed or unarmed, aligned with the state but organised from the bottom up, and often thought of in the same terms as paramilitarism. In the Turkish context, the most notorious state-sponsored vigilante/paramilitary group, the far-right Gray Wolves, emerged in the late 1960s, and collaborated closely with state security institutions. Yonucu departs from this conventional understanding of vigilantism by presenting an expanded and oppositional definition of the term within the context of the Devrimova neighborhood. According to Yonucu, neighborhood youth engaged in various vigilante practices, ranging from more public forms of vigilantism to armed and masked vigilantism, in order to protect the neighborhood's population from violence at the hands of state forces and their collaborators. In doing so, Yonucu reveals a very different form of vigilantism: with the state security apparatus posing a threat to local populations, and in the absence of a protective force against gang violence, local youth turn to a revolutionary form of vigilantism. The selective targeting of more peaceful forms of revolutionary

vigilantism by anti-terror laws complicates the picture (encounters of the revolutionary vigilantism and provocative state violence), revealing elusive dimensions of provocative state security techniques.

Considering these dimensions, Yonucu's book, by combining local practices with a global perspective, provides a better understanding of provocative state-sponsored police violence against ethnically and religiously marginalised and class-disadvantaged communities in Turkey. The book thus offers a valuable contribution to global literature, serving as a case study that investigates the interconnected formal and informal boundaries of police violence within the context of the official security force of the state. As such, the book should be of interest not only to academics working in the fields of anthropology and sociology but also to those in security studies and particularly policy stakeholders developing policies in a neoliberal era when many states are criticised for turning into police states.

Ayhan Işık
Independent Scholar

doi: 10.2979/tur.00030